Pest Update (February 3-10, 2010)

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In this issue **pg**

Why are my evergreens turning color? Color changes on evergreens are common during the mid-winter months and it does not always related to injury. Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) foliage may become yellowish green during the winter, a normal change, and then become bluish-green again once the weather warms in the spring. Arborvitaes (*Thuja occidentalis*) can also turn from a bright green in summer to a very ugly brown during the winter months as part of its normal adaptation to winter. Russiancypress (*Microbiota decussata*), an low growing evergreen can turn from a bright green in summer to the ugliest brownish purple by mid-winter. Many junipers (*Juniperus* spp) may turn almost a plum purple during the winter and return to green the following summer.

Usually the normal winter color change seen in some evergreens is uniform along the scale-like foliage or needles. Winter-burn (pictured) is

typically limited to the tips of needles or only portions of the plant and usually does not appear until later in the winter, often not until late March.

Herbicide carry over to new tree plantings is another common question at this time of year. How soon can we plant after atrazine is the frequent question and unfortunately there is no stock answer – it depends. Atrazine is a herbicide that is absorbed by the roots and accumulates in the growing tips and new foliage of trees. It inhibits photosynthesis so the foliage of affected plants often becomes yellowish. Since the herbicide accumulates in the plant, it is common to find higher concentrations in the plant than the surrounding soil. In one instance, the soil level of atrazine was about 1.6 ppm and in the tree about 8.5 ppm. Symptoms of atrazine exposure to trees may begin to appear in as low of foliage concentration of 2.5 ppm or even less. While atrazine is used in Christmas tree plantations, the application is typically on established trees and at specific times. Injury is sometimes reported for young trees planting in agricultural soils where atrazine was used for the previous year or years. There is no set time for waiting till planting trees on soils where the herbicide was used but waiting at least a year appears to be a very common recommendation and this should be viewed as the minimal wait time.

E-sample

I received an interesting sample regarding a Christmas tree. It seems that after the tree was set up in the house for awhile, hundreds of these small insects appeared. They seem to fade out (along with the tree) after Christmas and are not a problem now but the homeowner wondered what they were. The insect is the pine aphid (*Cinara* spp). This is a genus of large brown to black aphids that feed on pines and even Fraser firs. The aphid overwinters as eggs on the needle and once brought into the house on the Christmas tree these quickly hatch and the adult aphids begin to give birth to live young. The aphid population quickly grows and as the tree begins to dry these insects will begin to migrate into other areas of the house. They are not harmful, cannot bite people or pets, and soon die out. The only nuisance is if you smash one on your favorite couch they leave a big purple stain.